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[Elvin-Walsh, Louise](#), [Collins, Peter F.](#), & Ferguson, Maree
(2016)

Investigating the use of smartphone technology for nutrition monitoring post-bariatric surgery. In

Dietitians Association of Australia 33rd National Conference, 19-21 May 2016, Melbourne, Vic.

This file was downloaded from: <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/101142/>

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<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/doi/10.1111/1747-0080.12774/full>

INVESTIGATING THE USE OF SMARTPHONE TECHNOLOGY FOR NUTRITION MONITORING POST BARIATRIC SURGERY

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Optimising successful long-term outcomes of bariatric surgery is contingent on patient commitment to follow-up care. The reasons for lost to follow-up remain unclear, but might be due to patients not recognising the need for lifelong support from a dietitian. An original, online survey exploring technology use, communication preferences, nutrition monitoring methods, professional relationship expectations, reasons for lost to follow-up, smartphone and app use was developed and distributed to a convenience sample of specialist bariatric dietitians and bariatric patients. Recruitment methods included e-newsletters, social media and word-of-mouth. The survey completion rate was 85% ($n=50/59$) for dietitians and 80% ($n=39/49$) for patients. Smartphone ownership was 98% and 95% for dietitians and patients respectively. Common reasons for lost to follow-up indicate that a traditional in-clinic setting could be a barrier. Ninety-one percent of dietitians prefer to see patients face-to-face in their clinic, while patients are open to a greater variety of communication methods including email, apps and messaging. Both cohorts recognised the potential for emerging technologies to be used in practice with 78% ($n=42$) of dietitians already using apps in practice, 93% of these recommending apps to patients and 76% ($n=29$) of patients using health apps. The survey found existing apps do not meet the needs of the respondents. This study provides the first insight into the potential use of mobile devices and apps by dietitians and bariatric patients. It would appear embracing emerging technology could improve engagement, communication and support between dietitian and patient allowing for greater monitoring of long-term clinical outcomes.